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The Chartered Surveyors' Institution

SESSION 1945–46.

AT THE ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

Held at the Chartered Surveyors' Institution on Monday, 4th March, 1946.

Mr. E. B. GILLETT (*President*) in the Chair.

NEW MEMBERS.

The following members were received by the President prior to the meeting and signed the Register :—

Professional Associates :

BARRELL, VICTOR WILLIAM GEORGE.
BLYTH, DONALD GORDON.
BOWN, ERNEST WYNDHAM.
COLE, CHARLES ALBERT DAWSON.
CORDER, JOHN CHARLES.
DIXON, OSWALD MILLER.
HARPER, WALTER WILLIAM.
SMITH, DESMOND RUSSELL.
THORNHILL, PAUL DE GRELLE.
WEARE, REGINALD JAMES.

A PAPER on "Current Problems of Urban Estate Management" was read by Mr. K. MARR-JOHNSON (Member of Council) and was followed by a discussion. The Paper appeared in the March issue of the *Transactions.*

CURRENT PROBLEMS OF URBAN ESTATE MANAGEMENT.

Mr. JOHN A. F. WATSON (Fellow), who proposed a warm vote of thanks to the author, said that the greatest problem of all—the root problem from which all others sprang—was the national shortage of accommodation, especially of houses. It was a shortage not confined to any one grade of the community but one which showed at its worst, he supposed, in a working-

class district. He did not know the experience of other surveyors, but personally he found the morning post-bag in these days infinitely depressing. The letters which poured in were not just applications for accommodation; they were appeals, appeals for relief from well-nigh intolerable conditions of overcrowding and "doubling up" due to returning children and fathers.

It was extraordinarily difficult to sort them. Some system of sifting was needed, and in the case of an estate of any considerable size he thought it was impossible to do better than apply the "points" system used nowadays by most local authorities—i.e., to give so many points to applicants whose existing accommodation was overcrowded or insanitary, so many to bombed-out applicants, so many to applicants who had previously lived on the estate or in the district, and so many—a good many, in his view—to families with a large number of children. A points system of that kind was not, of course, infallible; human problems were not solved by mere arithmetic. The system, to his mind, should be used as a sieve to establish priority groups, not as a means of determining exactly the final order in which applicants should be offered tenancies. For a full discussion of the points system, he recommended a recent Report by the Housing Management Sub-Committee of the Ministry of Health, published a few months ago (see the November, 1945, *Journal*, p. 213).

A housing shortage and overcrowding went together. The author had pointed out that with Government propaganda urging sub-letting and the economic occupation of every single vacant room, it was idle to try to impose normal restrictions against sub-letting and the taking of lodgers. In many cases sub-letting was being made an opportunity for charging extortionate sub-rents. He did not know what could be done about it other than to keep a check, so far as possible, on what was happening.

What was being done to remedy the present desperate situation? First of all, they were continuing their war-time policy of "make do and mend." A large proportion of the building industry, as was well known, was still engaged on war damage repairs. In his experience, there had been a great disparity in the quality of such repairs as between one street and the next, and sometimes as between one house and the next. Some of the labour made available to local authorities for this purpose was very good; some of it, as many knew to their cost, was exceedingly bad. From the owners' point of view a great deal had depended upon the personal supervision of the local authority's activities by the owner's own surveyor. Personally, he had found that in areas where he had been able to keep a close watch on what was happening the best labour, somehow or other, seemed to have come his way!

He thought the average layman—and in that term he included most clients—had no idea of the difficulties confronting surveyors nowadays in doing ordinary running repairs after six years of enforced neglect. The shortage of materials was even worse than the shortage of labour. At times, quite suddenly, the whole of a certain type of commodity would vanish from the market: one week it would be lead, the next iron pipes, the following week baths. Bricks behaved in an extraordinary way. At the moment many people on estates in North London were sitting under leaky ceilings because he could get no zinc.

There was the formidable problem of trying to decide what was war

damage and what ordinary disrepair. Weeks went by while waiting for the War Damage Commission surveyor to arrive; doubtless he was very busy, but in the meantime the dilapidation got worse. Builders were working shorter hours. To complicate matters still further, many married women were still out at work and sometimes three or four attempts were necessary to get into a house to carry out urgent repairs.

The recently-published Report of the Silkin Committee, on which Committee he himself had had the honour to serve, had gone into the question of conversions very thoroughly. It concluded that so far as private owners were concerned, any effective reconditioning of the lower-rented types of property on an economic basis was hopelessly impracticable without some form of subsidy, or power to borrow on preferential terms. He did not know whether the Government were proposing to legislate on that Report, but if they did not, then apparently the only way in which that type of property could be converted was by the local authority under its extensive requisitioning powers. In that event it was necessary to envisage a state of affairs where the conscientious and well-intentioned landlord, who was anxious to recondition his property if in any way it could be made an economic proposition to do so, would sit back and have it requisitioned and under alien management for no one knew how many years.

With regard to new houses, temporary "chicken-coop" houses were going up, but in his own area he had yet to see the first completed new house. Comment on the figures in the recent White Paper and on the comparative opportunities and achievements of public and private enterprise would no doubt encroach on the political aspect, but he thought he might say this: that if it was necessary, or at least expedient, to limit the cost of a house built by private enterprise by a ceiling figure, there was little sense in including in that restrictive figure the value of the land. In outlying areas, where land values were low, it might be possible to erect houses within the prescribed limit; it must be so, or otherwise private owners and private builders would not already have achieved what they had achieved; but in the inner areas—particularly the inner areas of London—the position was surely impossible. With high land values, which inevitably absorbed a considerable proportion of the £1,200 or £1,300 (as the case might be) involved, it was not possible to erect even what was known as the Dudley house, the house of 900 superficial feet. Yet it was in inner districts near the industries where there were very considerable areas of bombed sites and where houses were most needed.

The Institution was very grateful to Mr. Marr-Johnson for his paper. These "current problems" were in fact, of course, war-time problems. Sad though it was, it was true that, with the one major exception of bombing, in the management of town estates they might still be at war.

Miss H. G. L. Alford, B.A. (Professional Associate), Housing Manager to the Metropolitan Borough of Fulham, who seconded the vote of thanks, said that the Institution was very much indebted to the author for outlining so clearly some of the very serious problems that beset all surveyors, and many of which could be translated into every other type of tenancy. Her own sphere was municipal, which still meant mostly the weekly tenancy. When the author spoke of breach of covenant, she translated that into sub-letting.

Their weekly tenancies were inevitably very overcrowded with married

sons and daughters. That was unavoidable, but she thought, in the interests of good management, it was very important that there should be no concealment of facts. Her own authority insisted on a statement in writing from the tenant giving the facts, so as to get a kind of whitewash over them. They were quite inevitable, but should be placed on record, or it led to the wrong sort of sub-letting.

Many references had been made to that unpopular subject—requisitioning. She thought the wittiest was that made by the President in his Opening Address. It was witty, but very cruel ; he said that it was " the pursuit of the uninhabited by the uninhibited." She spoke as one of the " uninhibited " having always supposed that that was a good thing to be ; but, as one who had to requisition, she understood only too well its unpopularity with many members of the Institution. She would suggest, however, that it was a duty, and an urgent duty, of a local authority, laid upon it from on high—which, of course, meant the Ministry of Health. If the authority slackened in vigilance for a moment, if there was a single empty house which somebody thought was habitable, though it was probably full of dry rot, everybody—the bombed out and homeless, the local councillors and everybody else—criticised the unhappy official. There were, however, problems connected with it " on the other side of the counter," particularly with regard to repairs, where the obligations were not at all clearly defined. In the main, the obligation for nearly all repairs was on the local authority ; but there came a time when the local authority, remembering that although it was not paid for out of rates it was paid for out of income tax, did draw the line at, say, completely renewing a roof, when it hoped not to hold the house for very long and the roof had actually been becoming dilapidated for at least twenty years.

Members were apt to think in terms of the excellent property they had looked after so vigilantly themselves, but there were other forms of property with which she, alas, was only too familiar, which had been totally neglected for a long time, and into which the local authority were called on to put money and material on a scale never before conceived. She would therefore ask members, when tempted to think harshly of the local authority, to remember that there was another side to the story.

When it came to the need not, perhaps, for a new roof, but perhaps for a new flat to a back addition, or something quite serious, which might cost anything up to, say, £50, the position was not at all clear. She had in mind poorish property, not particularly well built, where perhaps the roof had a life of 25 years. Where there was a reasonable owner, what proportion of the cost should they agree to bear ? The local authority did not want to pay the whole cost, but the owner did not know the period of requisition, and it was somewhat difficult, even with good will on both sides, to come to some sort of basis such as 25/75 of the estimated cost.

Another problem was that of re t. They had just been instructed, again from " on high," that the tenants were to pay the maximum rent under the Rent Restrictions Act. But what was the standard rent ? The houses were empty, there was no tenant to consult, and not all landlords had the high standards of members of the Institution. When the landlord was asked by the district valuer, as he always was, what was the last rent he received, it was naturally to his interest to pitch it as high as possible, because he wanted the highest compensation rent possible. It was therefore quite

impossible to know what the standard rent was, and so the prospect of trying to make thousands of tenants pay an unknown rent on strict orders from the Government created a very difficult situation at the present time.

She was glad to leave that unpleasant subject and pass to a problem which was current, and would become more so. The Government had clearly indicated that in future, whoever owned houses or built them, there were to be mixed communities, and no longer that segregation of classes which everyone disliked so much. We called them " working classes " in England. She had just been on a lecture tour in Canada, and there one talked about " lower income groups," ignoring the fact that it meant exactly the same thing.

She thought mixed communities were wholly to the good. Bombing had given municipalities a real experience of dealing with mixed income groups, and there was one lesson in that respect which had been learned in her own borough. They happened to have some large blocks of luxury flats which had formerly been occupied by refugees from Gibraltar. Into those flats had to go every type of family of every income group. The local authority, however, were very anxious to make it a success, and they looked to two things so far as was possible. One was that the families chosen were likely to value a very good type of property and take care of it, and the other was that they were likely to have a quiet domestic standard. On that understanding, 600 people were put into 600 rooms in three large blocks of luxury flats.

The experiment had been most unexpectedly successful. She only got the clue to the reason for that when a member of the Institution who was acting on behalf of the owners, a very large West End firm, came to look at the structure and was very interested in what had been done, and very pleased to find the structure still standing. He had had great experience of real luxury flats with luxury people in them, and he said " I think you have a much better atmosphere here with people of different incomes but the same standard of domestic behaviour than I get with people of the same very high incomes but different standards of domestic behaviour." She thought that was a point to note, because it seemed to show a way in which this mixing could work well.

Members were greatly indebted to the author, not only for pointing out the appalling complexities of their everyday life but for giving concrete instances of its complexity. The author's general conclusions were very much to the point. She was not one of those who were always " agin the Government " because it was a lot of trouble to do what the Government wanted ; she was in favour of many of the things that various Governments had sought to achieve ; but she was sure that the appalling complexity which existed required the most urgent administrative attention at the highest level of the Civil Service and at once. It was one of the most important problems of the time. Personally, she found that she was living from hand to mouth, from day to day, from regulation to circular, from circular to regulation, and that she no longer had the time, the energy, the mind or the memory, for the fundamental things in her profession. There was a strong tradition in the Institution, and in the small Society of Women Housing Managers, of which she was a member, of training and teaching, teaching the untaught, and training intelligent people to qualify. They were

always trying to do that, and members of the Institution had a very high standard in regard to it ; but how was it possible for them to do it when they themselves hardly knew any longer what the fundamentals were ? She thought this was one of the most urgent problems of the time.

Mr. ARTHUR H. DAVIS (Fellow) supporting the vote of thanks agreed that one of the troubles of to-day was a surfeit of legislation and orders, to which were about to be added a further and never-ending supply, until the whole system would become so complex and over-organised that it might break down under its own momentum.

The author referred to certain legislation as designed to restrict the unscrupulous speculator and landlord, but those unscrupulous persons were a triumvirate, of which the unscrupulous tenant was the third party.

On the question of restrictive covenants, the author had, he thought, overlooked Defence Regulation No. 68CB (S.R. & O., 1945, No. 1452), which, apart from conferring certain further powers upon local authorities, also gave the right to lessees and other persons who held under restrictive covenants, in certain conditions to break their covenants, and make reconstructions and alterations in order to help in the provision of further accommodation. Whether that Regulation would permanently affect the written contract between landlord and tenant it was difficult to say. The question appeared at present to be an open one and dependent on future conditions ; but, having given authority for the breaches, how would it be possible to detract therefrom ?

The war had certainly upset " the even tenor of our way " with regard to repairing covenants under leases, and considerable discretion would be necessary for some time to come in attempting to enforce these under current leases. The fact that lessees had been spared the expense of extensive repairs during the six years of war, and would probably be largely so spared for a further considerable period, would not in his view benefit them financially, as the deterioration to the fabric and the extra cost of building and repair work would more than counterbalance money saved by previous *force majeure* neglect. Indeed, it was probable that many of the smaller lessees would need financial assistance to help them put their properties in proper order, and owners would in many cases find it advantageous to assist them, in the interests of both their tenants and themselves. He suggested that such expenditure by landlords who were in a fiduciary position to others, such as trustees, could properly be treated as a charge against capital, in view of the extraordinary circumstances.

Regarding dilapidation claims against lessees, at the termination of leases, lessees frequently claimed that much of the work called for was due to war damage. That point could be decided, where there was lack of agreement between the parties, by preparing a schedule of what might fairly be described as being war damages, and agreeing these with the Commission's assessor, with the result that those not classed as war damage would be, under the terms of the contract, ordinary dilapidations. Like the author, he had not found it difficult to come to amicable arrangements with lessees, although there were tenants who took advantage of the circumstances.

He agreed with the author that on the restoration of war damage by the lessee, the lessor's rights under the repairing covenants were revived, so that if the lessee had carried out those repairs in a perfunctory manner he had only himself to blame if difficulties arose later.

Damage to party walls by enemy action frequently created considerable difficulty, and disputes might eventually arise, especially where the exposed faces of those walls had been rendered as a protection against the weather. One method of dealing with these might, in some cases, be by cantilever foundations for the building owner's flanks superstructure and the retention of the existing party walls as non-weight-carrying enclosing walls only.

Dry rot was a great source of anxiety and expense, particularly as it frequently gained a considerable hold in a building before its presence was discovered. It was a frequent difficulty in settling Compensation (Defence) Act and war damage claims, as its incidence as a part of a claim was usually disputed. Dry rot did occur despite all precautions and, apart from damaged roofs, broken rain-water pipes, blocked gullies and so on, other prolific but perhaps not always readily discernible causes were the fine cracks caused by continual vibration from bombs and blast at the junctions of balconies and main walls, main walls and paved area spaces, damaged door and window reveals and the like.

He agreed that war damage contribution payments were an indemnity against loss in the same way that any civil insurance premium might be, but, where a cost-of-works payment was determined, in order that it should be truly effective, the cost of works should include the expenditure necessary to rebuild the property in accordance with local bye-laws ; otherwise it was not a true cost-of-works payment.

He was not averse to the requisitioning by a local authority of badly damaged properties for the purpose of living accommodation, because they took over the onus and responsibility of carrying out essential repairs and decorations, and usually made a satisfactory job of the work, although they frequently made structural alterations and additions which were not always advantageous to the particular building. These, however, were matters which could be adjusted later in the compensation claim. Such requisitions would probably continue for a long time to come. That was not, he thought, disadvantageous from the estate management point of view, because firstly, the rent was paid with unfailing regularity ; secondly, the authority kept the property in order ; and thirdly, they took over the responsibility of looking after the tenants.

The sting of the author's remarks was in the tail end of his paper. Small property owners were being ruined by the heavy cost of repairs and of local rates and taxation, particularly where tenants were protected by the Rent Restrictions Acts. Indeed, it was not uncommon to have to present income accounts to one's clients showing an adverse balance. It could be truly said that the ownership of property to-day, save in exceptional cases, was not an investment but a business, and one requiring care, skill and imagination in its management.

The present trend of events was likely, with the excessive user of houses built for one occupation only, the lack of repairs, and the breaking of restrictive covenants, to create more slums. Everywhere one saw good-class property rapidly depreciating and deteriorating.

Mr. Hugh Brackett, M.B.E. (Professional Associate), representing the Junior Organisation, said that the paper would be of particular value to surveyors returning to their calling after a considerable absence. It was to a very changed civilian life that they returned. The author had referred to the

need for re-training those now returning, and personally his experience supported that necessity ; but he had also found that the pressure of daily events made it necessary to deal with cases as they arose, and to rely upon the guidance of those who had been practising their profession during the period of intensive legislation, and upon research by midnight oil on whatever point arose.

In the very general impression he had gained of the change, it seemed to him that there was one outstanding alteration. Just as the Acquisition of Land Act, 1919, changed the measure of compensation payable on compulsory acquisition from the loss to the individual (as provided by the Lands Clauses Act) to the market value, so war-time legislation appeared by devious means, where it was deemed to be in the public interest, to have departed from the principle of market value.

Mentioning that for one brief period in his war service he had been in the Faroe Islands, where he had had added to his other duties hirings and works services, the speaker said there was only one thing he remembered of Danish law, namely, that in Denmark it was not possible to own land outright ; one could own land only in certain aspects ; the remainder had been taken away by legislation.

War-time legislation had certainly completed the process—begun before the war—of preventing an owner from doing what he liked with his own. It was all part of the pattern of conscription. The conscription of capital during the war kept up with the conscription of man-power, though the conscription appeared in various guises ; requisitioning, rent restriction, town planning, compulsory purchase at 1939 values, all went to make up the conscription of real estate capital in the public interest.

His impression was that the controls, whether good or bad, made life so complicated that the author's description of the private individual as the co-ordinator between Government departments was virtually the position which had been reached. The liaison officers in the Army, whose whole duty was to see that the left hand of the commander knew what his right hand was doing, appeared to have no counterpart in civil life, though one could find in civil life the counterpart of almost every other military appointment.

The paper set out, in a manner calculated to make it a guide for those returning from the Forces, the pitfalls which had opened up during the war, and suggested practical methods of bridging over or going round those pitfalls. We were exhorted by the Government to work harder, but with the complications of procedure added to the effects of destruction it was going to be difficult for the profession to step up its productive output, and certainly from what he had seen since his return, to raise the standard which had been set during the war. While adding his thanks to the author, he would like at the same time to voice the thanks which he thought were due from all those returning from the Forces to those who had maintained the profession while they had been away.

Mr. Bernard Briant (Fellow), speaking on the question of dilapidations, said he had taken a lessee to court successfully, but he thought that was largely due to the care with which the schedule of dilapidations was prepared ; the war damage was separated quite distinctly from the ordinary repairs which had been neglected.

On the restoration of war damage and the quality of the work, the lessor's surveyor had the greatest difficulty, but some of the worst offenders were the local authorities themselves, and it seemed necessary to be supervising supervisors all day long ; one of his staff had done very little else for a long time. In one case, where a row of seriously-damaged houses had been thought beyond repair, the local authority changed their minds and repaired them, with very inffdierent workmanship. Having requisitioned, they prepared and he agreed on a schedule of condition, being careful to distinguish between what would be occupational damage and unrepaired or indifferently repaired war damage, but he had not yet been able to persuade the War Damage Commission to agree his schedule of unrepaired war damage formally, even though he had met them on the premises. Postponing agreement might lead to future trouble and was a disadvantage to both sides.

On the question of quality of work, there was one point which might help estate managers who were having trouble through mysterious leaks in roofs. At a certain period, slates of a particular size were unobtainable, with the consequence that smaller slates were used ; but the old battens were not altered, so that unless the pitch was a steep one the lap might be insufficient. Therefore the water seeped up underneath the lap and stained the ceilings, and nobody could see why it happened.

With regard to non-conforming users, in his view a working-class residential area must include light factories. The workpeople wanted to work where they could get home to dinner. The factories could be of pleasing elevation, not make much smoke and have their own loading spaces, but they should be left where they were, and town planning regulations should not forbid reasonable expansion ; otherwise the factory owner would have to choose between carrying on as before or moving out of the area altogether.

He agreed with the author that the L.C.C. should grant licences for 10 or 20 years instead of three years, to get over the war difficulties. He did not know whether the War Damage Commission were going to pay for the restoration, even though it was temporary, but if they did the question of security of tenure would be the same as before, and he did not think that the lessee had anything to worry about ; and if his 21 years was extended to the lessor's requirements, it seemed to meet the matter at both ends.

On the question of foundations, a house built forty or fifty years ago should have sufficient concrete, even though perhaps it did not exactly comply with the bye-laws ; and if the owner was willing to risk putting his new house on those old foundations, and the War Damage Commission were not willing to pay for improvement by more concrete, it was not reasonable to press the bye-laws which were not so important as the nature of the soil, which varied in different districts.

With regard to conversion into flats, he had found that the local authority not only embarked on repairs, but also on conversion schemes, without notice. He thought they should apply for the lessor's consent to alter, and pay his surveyor's fees, like any other tenants. Supervision was needed. Under pressure from him, a London borough provided a hurriedly-prepared plan (supplied unofficially for the attention of one of his clerks), but they provided no specification, nor did they reply to his letters of protest. That compared with the ten plans and specifications required from private enterprise, as the author had set out.

Regarding compulsory acquisition, the Ministry of Health had just

insisted upon purchasing for temporary housing, rather than renting, a small piece of freehold land which was part of an estate of about 30 acres in London which his clients had owned since the time of Charles II. Did the author think it possible to get that decision reversed ?

Miss Alford had advocated the need for more thought at the highest levels and he agreed this would be a welcome substitute for such masses of printed paper. There was another difficulty. The Government and the local authorities were taking on all the available technical staff, leaving the private practitioner with insufficient. Moreover, if higher wages were to remain, something would have to be done about the scale of charges.

He would like to congratulate Miss Alford on her speech. He understood it was the first time in the history of the Institution that a vote of thanks had been seconded by one of the women members of the Institution, but no-one could have spoken with more efficiency and charm than Miss Alford.

Mr. J. G. Elsworthy (Fellow) thought that the periodic inspection, which meant keeping in personal touch with the tenants on estates, was more than ever necessary to-day. He found that the bulk of the tenants—probably 98 per cent.—were perfectly reasonable, sensible people, and if one explained to them the difficulties about repairs, and lettings, and one's inability to provide accommodation which did not exist, he found they generally agreed and it was possible to get their co-operation. He had had tenants say to him " We know that it is difficult for you to do repairs at the present time, but if you will let us have an allowance for the materials we have a relative who can do the repairs." If one could get that spirit among one's tenants, many of the difficulties would disappear.

By way of example, on a very difficult estate he finally became so desperate that he sent notices to all the tenants asking them to appoint a deputation to come to see him. Five gentlemen came, and they talked incessantly for an hour and a half : he did not think he said a single word. At the end of that time they departed and said they were perfectly satisfied.

The next point was the local authority. One of the great London authorities had just concluded that it was a waste of time to have a matter referred first to the city valuer, then to the public health department, then to the architect's department, then to the medical officer of health, and so on, and had appointed a director of housing. He would like to suggest in all seriousness that the Government should appoint some person or department to co-ordinate the work and be prepared to deal with applications without the waste of time involved in applicants having to deal with four or five separate Government departments as well as the local authority.

He was very worried about the question of rebuilding on old foundations and the reluctance of the War Damage Commission to allow compensation for foundations, which might very likely be disturbed and defective. To put a new house on old foundations, which was what the tendency would be if there was to be no compensation or help from the authorities, would be storing up trouble for the occupier in the future.

He thought the Institution might help by pointing out to the Government that some of their regulations acted like a boomerang. Regulation 62ca stated that property which had formerly been residential must not be used for any other purpose. At the present time those who had offices in the West End knew that there were large numbers of mansions requiring at least

twelve servants to run them which it was impossible to use for residential purposes to-day. Those houses, which were quite unsuited for conversion into flats, were admirably suited for office accommodation, but the reply of the authorities was still the same : they were formerly residential and must remain so. He thought the Institution should make a protest, or at any rate approach the Government department concerned, with a view to avoiding difficulties of that sort.

Mr. W. H. Simpson, F.A.I., a visitor from the Auctioneers' and Estate Agents' Institute, referring to Miss Alford's remarks on requisitioning, said his experience had been that it had not proved to the eventual loss of the landlord to have his property requisitioned, especially in the case of properties which had been controlled under the earlier Rent Acts. He had found in his negotiations with district valuers that one was not of necessity bound, for a compensation rental, to the low controlled rent, and that fact did give an opportunity to a landlord to secure a fair return for property in good condition. He could not understand, however, why the Ministry of Health should direct local authorities to relate their rents charged to re-housed persons to the maximum permissible under the Rent Acts, when the compensation rent might by agreement with the district valuer exceed that figure. He would like to hear of a local authority referring the matter back to the Ministry of Health and pointing out that this would be an excellent opportunity for local authorities to assess economic rents, which one day might take their place in any scheme put into effect along the lines of the Ridley Report.

Mr. W. M. Balch (Fellow) said the author had given some very interesting illustrations of the cost of certain schemes of conversion and the return that the landlord would obtain on his money if those schemes were carried out. Conversion was an alternative use of the land, the other alternative being rebuilding. It would be interesting if in the cases mentioned the author had any figures which he could give to show the comparable return if the properties had been pulled down and the site rebuilt on.

Mr. Humphrey Ryde (Hon. Secretary), expressing his admiration not only of the paper but also of the very high level of the debate, said he thought that one thing which stood out that evening was the excessive number of different forms which had to be filled up. He had recently noticed in the press, in a discussion on the recent Housing Returns, that the private builders who had erected 1,116 houses for the period to 31st January, 1946, had had to fill up 100,000 forms before they could begin the work.

Another point brought out by the discussion was the high cost of repairs. He believed it would be found that the cost of repairing the dilapidations throughout the realm would amount to many times the cost of repairing the war damage, and any agent who had not made provision for those deferred repairs would find, he feared, considerable difficulty in future.

Mr. Marr-Johnson, replying to the discussion, said he had been asked two specific questions. The first was what one should do if the local authority refused to lease land for temporary houses and insisted on buying it. He was afraid that there was no remedy for that. One could appeal to the Ministry of Health, but he did not think the Minister would support such an appeal against the local authority, if the latter produced good reasons for wanting to buy the land.

The second question was whether instead of converting houses it would be better from the financial point of view to rebuild. The examples he had given were not quite typical cases in that respect. In the first case a block of flats was built on land which he thought under the town planning provisions was zoned as industrial; therefore it might be said that the proper thing to do was to demolish and build something industrial. In the second case there was not much demand for rebuilding; the levels were difficult and if the houses were pulled down he thought no one would want to build on the site for some time to come. The structures, however, were moderately good, and it seemed better to convert the houses properly rather than let them for some meaner form of multiple occupation. In the third case—houses in the middle of London—he had valued the land on the assumption that but for the conversion, private houses would have been built there—he thought that that was probably what the L.C.C. would have agreed under town planning. It was roughly on the basis of £75 a house, which was the ground rent the landlords obtained for fairly expensive houses before the war; but they could not expect to build expensive houses for several years to come, and so they had taken the land value as the rent for the house and said that anything above that represented the return on the capital expenditure. One might reap an immediate financial advantage by doing a poor adaptation instead of a proper conversion, but he felt that, in this case at least, in the long-term interests of the estate, he should not do that.

He wished that he had time to comment on all that had been said in the discussion. There was one inference drawn by Mr. Watson, on which he wished to comment, namely, that the present problems were principally due to the war. It was true that management problems were as grave as they were because of the war, and some of them were a legacy from the previous war; but many of the difficulties now being encountered were beginning to be felt before that war. For instance, town planning was an elaboration which would have come in any case, likewise the public health laws.

The President said that before formally putting the vote of thanks he would like to say how glad he was to have been in the Chair at a meeting which had made professional history to the extent of the vote of thanks being seconded by one of the women members of the Institution. Those who knew Miss Alford would not be surprised at the success she had made of it. They also welcomed from the Society of Women Housing Managers, of which Miss Alford was a member, Mrs. Hill, the President, and Miss Miskin, the Chairman of that body. He hoped that they and the other lady members present had spent a pleasant evening.

The paper, if he might say so, had been an excellent one, and the discussion had shown the very keen interest which he knew such a topical subject would arouse. He hoped the author would feel rewarded for the tremendously hard work that the preparation of the paper must have involved. Mr. Marr-Johnson was made to work very hard on the Council and never failed to respond most willingly. It might be added that his work lay as a rule with such high ecclesiastical dignitaries that he was essentially the man to deal with conversion!

The vote of thanks was carried with acclamation, and the meeting then terminated.